PLOTINIAN PERSONALITY XXVI — PENETRATION

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This lesson in the Enneads of Plotinus is a consideration of Are All Souls One? through sections one to five of the tractate, and the ultimate fullness of living is here an appreciation of the pervading presence of personality through the total ground of experience or the power of penetration latent in every human soul. If the diffusion of life is a compelling influence in the being, then man is taken this way and that and in the process is never given opportunity to collect himself in any measure of unity. Sometimes when the consciousness of man has experience in the sheer undifferentiation of the realm of matter he will have a knowledge at first hand of the utter loss of self in diffusion. Occultists identify consciousness so left without center or anchorage as consciousness in the lower astral world. In other words the personality active in its midrank or on the astral level is wholly directed downwards and in its self-projection into the eternal flux of matter finds itself totally in flux. The result is utterly terrifying because consciousness cannot persist without a chance to ground itself. The situation similar to this, as produced by deliberate effort in brain washing procedure is brutal in its capacity to shake the mind loose from its moorings and thus leave it open to the compulsion of suggestion. Therefore the strongest instinct of personality is to resist dominance by matter's flux or to hold some measure of touch with primitive source in eternal unity. The descent of the soul is permitted to the degree that contributes best to experience since its blind adherence to basic unity will cause it to narrow its domain, withhold its penetration and center its existence in a realm that it can embrace in consciousness. But the real penetration of the soul is almost never known to it, and personality seldom indulges this capacity for outstreaming into a universality of experience. To impress upon the consciousness the experience-potentiality of selfhood man is taught that all souls are one and that he is a part of all life. But to impress equally the necessity for a true source or center in self he is taught also that he is divine within himself or complete in the individuality of his own being. Personality thus takes on a double aspect in its roots as utterly self-sufficient and yet completely in fellowship with all livingness.

The dynamic of consciousness is this practical duality. Consciousness which normally is beyond separation from source undergoes no real risk of annihilation. Personality normally functioning in a constant expansion of its interest and a continual penetration to greater and wider aspects of experience faces no menace to its being unless in disinclination to give fully of itself. New Thought and occultism in

consequence emphasize an absolute fullness of living and self-giving or a penetration of awareness to all possibility of knowing in an insatiable love of living and an invisible fellowship with all of life. Plotinus stresses the unity of soul since as soul penetrates to all parts of body so All-soul penetrates to all souls and binds them eternally in itself, and he also stresses the true individuality of personality since as body gains variety of knowing through variety of function so All-soul requires variety through all souls.

The sustaining value in personality is its underlying gift of unity to all-variety. In Platonic philosophy there is no negation of multiplicity but multiplicity is seen as properly the facets of unity in knowing. The Supreme alone is above multiplicity, Plotinus points out, but the Supreme is known only by an intuition of the human mind. A sense of ultimate order and resolution is needed for the soul's faith in its own power of unification and ordering in the sphere of its own special function, but actual ultimate supremacy is beyond direct knowing. Multiplicity is the vitality of existence or the livingness of potentiality, and personality primarily or directly and practically is interested in its self-discovery through its penetration to the limitless variety sustained in the visible universe of flux. This penetration is no loss of self through infinite regression but is the constant and continual recovery of selfhood in the creative unification of a known or penetrated variety.

The social genius of the soul is found in its sense of undivided unity of source or its intuition of perfect fellowship with all souls in ultimate realms of being. Plotinus is unable to identify the higher except in its indivisibility. Values have no existence other than in their sharing or among the selfish individuals of any group the deprivation of others which is reverse sharing or sharing in desire, and heaven is beyond conception unless as a reunion of loved ones or an anthropomorphic comradeship with divinity. Source as such is not in division among bodies, and personality is the nondivisible creative power of individuality as variety in experience or a penetration not in conflict with unity. The practical aspect of personality is its totality in livingness. Its part in diffusion is a penetration that is emphasis not of the variety but of the unity. Plotinus sees this clearly in teaching that souls are not the One-Soul split up. Personality is One in potentiality and hence capable of infinite penetration. Were its touch with variety a total adoption of variety its process of outgiving would be an infinite regression, but actually it lives by an infinite regression as an absolute return to self. Penetration really is a unification of all things or a unified drawing of all of them to a center in appreciation and realization. There is no underlying partiality in the operation of this penetration by personality, and where things take on a differing significance there is only a varying reference within the self. Literally the regard of soul or concern of per-

sonality is equal in all contact. It is of wholeness per se.

The individuality of personality lies in the immediateness of its being. Plotinus is careful to show that the oneness of all souls is not a matter of cause-and-effect or at all the product of an outgrowth from a single original but that the One is the entire in all. The identity in variety is personality as whole-potential, and this identity is not separation in fact as a manifestation of universal flux but is freedom or independence from any necessary relation to any part of manifestation of variety. The oneness of all souls is their present fidelity to a sharable and knowable completeness. The ultimate distinction of personality is its absoluteness of identity as such without any limitation in an identity marked or held in a realm of flux. This nature of soul may be illustrated by the mental process. In thinking a certain element will be brought to the fore and others held back, but the others could as well be forward and at other times and in other reference will so be found. Soul takes on particular emphasis and even high momentary distinction, but such identifies the soul only in the situation. Actually the distinction of the soul is that it will so stand forth and never in any special phase of such a standing forth. Personality is self-filled in its touch with source, and it is free and capable of infinite penetration in its absolute disentanglement from necessity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND APPLICATION

(1) What is the power of penetration latent in every soul? When is it of service? How? What does personality do on the astral level? Why? What is this level?

(2) Why should man be taught two things about soul? What two things? What is the practical duality of consciousness? What does Plotinus teach about soul and personality? Why must there be multiplicity of living?

(3) When is there no menace to either personality or consciousness? To what occult teaching does this lead? How does this teaching follow the Platonic idea of unity in diversity? How is the unity of the Supreme to be known?

(4) By what technique does personality discover itself? Upon what does the existence of values depend? What does personality accomplish through penetration?

(5) How can personality take part in diffusion without being itself weakened by division? How does Plotinus explain the oneness of soul? What is the absoluteness which is distinctive of personality as compared with other identity?